

# Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS)



## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

ISIS is a Sunni Islamic rebel group that has control over territory in Iraq and Syria. Globally recognized as a 'terrorist group', ISIS, or more commonly known as the "Islamic State" has grown very dangerous starting wars and other violent acts. ISIS has carried out many brutal attacks and encouraged rebel fighting. They are now targeting journalists and aid workers who they hold for ransom to help fund their terrorist group. ISIS uses social media to recruit new members and expand their terrorist group. Their main goal is to establish an **Islamic Caliphate State**. Many innocent lives are being lost to this Islamic extremist group and something must be done to stop it.

## ISIS

ISIS is a jihadist organization that is trying to form an Islamic State throughout the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia. ISIS sells the idea to other Muslims throughout the world that they will have a brotherhood within this extremist group. America, Canada, and the United Kingdom have seen men of their country fighting in this Islamic group. They have US-equipped weapons being used to kill many innocent people. They are capturing innocent civilians all over the world often killing them to make point of their radical group. The United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and France are all taking steps to stopping this very serious terrorist group.

## SYRIA

The civil unrest that has led to civil war in Syria began during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011. There was a call for the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Assad's assault on protesters escalated the situation and led to the formation of the Free Syrian Army, an armed rebel group with the intention of toppling Assad. In January 2012, the al-Nusra front was created by Abu Mohammed al-Joulani and established as al-Qaeda in Syria. By March the al-Nusra front was the strongest rebel group fighting against Assad and trying to establish Islamic law in rebel held territories. In April 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released a statement claiming the merger of ISIS and the al-Nusra front, a merger denied by al-Joulani. This announcement and subsequent denial led to infighting in the

rebel groups. In June 2013, the United States armed Syrian rebels against Assad's regime after receiving confirmation of the regime's possession of chemical weapons. In August 2013, Assad was accused of using chemical weapons against civilians, leading to the death of 1,500 people. In September, Russia's Vladimir Putin brokered a deal with Assad for moving Syria's chemical weapons under international control and destroying their weapon's facilities. This arms treaty gives hope to the international community that there may be a solution and an end to the civil war. In January 2014 peace talks in Geneva commence between Assad's regime and the Syrian National Coalition. In February, second round talks took place and failed due to an inability to set an agenda. June 2014 brought presidential elections to Syria (resulted in Assad's re-election and the condemnation of the elections internationally). In the same month ISIS establishes themselves as a new caliphate and renamed themselves The Islamic State. June also saw the destruction of Syria's last chemical weapons facilities. By August, the Islamic State took control of the entire Raqqa province. In September United States President Obama vowed action again the Islamic State and started combined airstrikes with Arab countries: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. A war that was started by the Syrian people in the hopes of toppling a regime and instating democracy.

## HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

ISIS' ideology comes from the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Organization of Monotheism and Jihad) that was established in Iraq in 2004 by the Salafi-jihad Jordanian Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi (founder of Al Qaeda in Iraq) who joined forces with Al Qaeda's Osama Bin

Laden. When American troops killed Zarqawi in 2006 along with his successors, the leadership was passed on to Abu Bakr al Banghdadi. Al Qaeda in Iraq joined forces with Jabhat al-Nursa and established the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham with the joint interest of establishing a Sunni majority regions of Iraq and Syria. ISIS claims its ideology on oneness of Godship and all worship other than God constitutes disbelief.



Figure 1 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of ISIS, (CNN image)

## DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

### Lines in the Sand

The conflicts unleashed in Iraq and Syria have merged to become the epicenter of a struggle between Persian-Shiite Iran, Arab-Sunni Saudi Arabia and Turkic-Sunni Muslim Turkey.



Source: Pew Research Center (Shiite population)  
The Wall Street Journal

**IRAN:** Tehran has deployed Revolutionary Guard Forces to Iraq; it views any threat to Shiite Muslim holy sites there as a vital national security interest.

**SAUDI ARABIA:** The Sunni-dominated country's rivalry with Iran for preeminence in the Muslim world means any escalation of Iranian intervention will increase pressure on Riyadh to follow suit.

**SYRIA:** The extremists challenging Baghdad are also a key faction in the uprising against the Assad regime and view Syria and Iraq as an interchangeable battlefield in their quest to create an Islamic caliphate.

**JORDAN:** The escalating conflict means an increase of what it already has plenty of: refugees. More than 1 million Syrians have fled to the Hashemite Kingdom.

**TURKEY:** The capture of 80 Turkish hostages by militants underscores the NATO member's acute exposure to the violence. The rising stakes threaten its ambitions to become a regional power and could further destabilize its polarized politics ahead of August elections.

ISIS has gained a major foothold in Iraq and Syria due to Syria's civil war that started in 2011. An exhausted and disorganized secular rebel front allowed room for Muslim extremist groups such as ISIS to move in and claim territory effectively diluting the war against Syria's president Bashar al Assad. These rebel groups are now outnumbered by religious extremists that have aligned themselves with ISIS who have carried out brutal attacks and caused rebel infighting. As of August 22, 2014 the United Nation estimated

that the Syrian conflict has cost 191,000 lives<sup>ii</sup> and currently UNHCR has identified 3,323,859 persons of concern. The conflict in Syria and subsequently the escalation of violence because of ISIS has had international ramifications and has therefore required and international response.



*refugee camp in Mosul <sup>iii</sup>*

## **HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS**

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, 3,214,466 Syrian people have registered as refugees<sup>iv</sup>. ISIS is directly responsible for thousands of deaths in Northern Iraq and held territory in Syria<sup>v</sup>. The enormous influx of asylum seekers has put an incredible strain the Syria's neighboring countries of Jordan and Turkey and the conditions in which refugees are living lead to illness, starvation, violence, lack of education, and child marriages. Updated numbers released in December 2014 state that there are 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, 5.5 million children have been affected, 7.6 million are internally displaced (still in Syria but without a home), and more than 3 million are externally displaced (in countries outside of Syria)<sup>vi</sup>. The need for international humanitarian aid and an end to the conflict is imperative to ensure the survival of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees.





## INFLUENCE OF ISIS

The issue with ISIS is not regressing at this time and more action needs to be taken to stop this group from harming more people. This is a very sophisticated terrorist group with members who have military experience, and will cause a great threat. Capturing and beheading journalists, massacring religious groups, and have been the source of terrorist attacks. With the resources this group seems to have they are on a fast track to greater control over territories. With their ideal Islamic Caliphate State in mind they will go to any extreme to achieve their goals.

According to maps recently released by ISIS, the Islamic State intends to spread its borders throughout the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia. This expansion is to be carried out over the next five years<sup>vii</sup>. Evidence of the Islamic State's spread can already be seen in many countries outside of controlled territory in Iraq and Syria. An argument can be made that the US-led coalition designed to destroy the Islamic State has only enhanced its legitimacy. In Pakistan, sympathy from ex-Al Qaeda militants makes the country a prime area for the spread of the Islamic State. Spreading to Pakistan however could lead to copious amounts of bloodshed due to battles between Al Qaeda and ISIS. In western China the Muslim Uighurs have sought out terrorist training from ISIS; according to the Chinese government; in order to establish a break away country. The Islamic State-affiliate "Soldiers of the Caliphate in the Land of Algeria" took over the Gao province of Mali and instituted punishment for breaking the rules of the Qur'an. This year they killed a French tourist in Algeria as a result of French participation in the fight against the Islamic State. In India there has been a rise in Islamic State sympathy and public support. This year Mumbai born and IS militant, Arif Ejaz Majeed, was killed making national headlines in India. Students have been photographed wearing pro IS t-shirts and filmed waving the Islamic State flag. Australia and many European countries have banned their citizens from traveling to IS held territories<sup>viii</sup>.

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

In addition to taking over crude oil fields, ISIS has targeted western journalists and aid workers in their efforts to fund the establishment of their Islamic State, sometimes killing those they capture when their demands are not met. In addition, ISIS has proven to be capable at recruiting new members around the globe through social media aiming their messages at young Muslims. The international community is taking the situation with ISIS seriously and is taking steps to stop the extremist group.

The international community takes this very serious and is working hard to prevent

further damage to the world from ISIS. The United Nations has called upon the Security Council to get involved to help with the crisis.

## ARMING THE ENEMY

What has enabled the rebel group from sustaining its military operations and control over Iraqi, Syrians, and Kurdish territory has been a substantial supply of weapons supplied by the United States, amongst other nations. As the Islamic State leads attacks equipped with US-manufactured weapons, investigations continue in understanding how the radical group has come to possess weapons that were never supplied to them. Conflict Armament Research, a London-based research group has investigated this issue and discovered that many of the weapons being used by ISIS are in fact made by America<sup>ix</sup>. Initially distributed to Iraqi forces and Syrian and Kurdish rebel groups, these weapons have been seized by ISIS as they capture territory in Iraq and Syria. This is how ISIS has come to possess American armored vehicles from Iraqi forces in Mosul, initially brought over nine years ago during US invasion of Iraq. Additionally, some weapon airdrops provided by the US military, intended to be supplied to the Free Syrian Army<sup>x</sup>, have mistakenly fallen into the lap of ISIS. With ISIS able to equip itself with American armaments, this calls for closer examination at how US and allied forces focus on the issue with ISIS. Nevertheless, by choosing to withhold weapon airdrops to prevent an ISIS interception may provide to be more costly as it may only further ISIS' insurgency into greater territory.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What further action could the UN take to help stabilize the region and the conflict with ISIS?
2. How can the UN provide aid to the Humanitarian concerns?
3. Should the UN expand its role in the Syrian Civil War conflict?
4. Should US and allied forces continue provide arms for the Syrian Free Army and Kurdish forces?

# FUNDING ISIS

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is the world's best-funded terrorist group and is richer than some small countries. How does ISIS, now controlling territory in Syria and Iraq, fill its coffers?



## Independently Wealthy

Unlike other groups, which rely on state sponsors, major donors, or abuse of charity, ISIS is financially independent due to its successful criminal enterprise.



## An Illegal "Inheritance"

Then known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the group brought in some \$70 million a year through criminal activities—and was so flush that central al-Qaeda asked the group for money in 2005.



## Growing the Business

ISIS continues to engage in activities such as smuggling, extortion, and crime. Not being tied to major donors has helped the group evade counter-terrorism finance measures.



## Private Gulf Donations

Private contributions to ISIS—as well as to other groups operating in Syria, such as al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra—are a concern for U.S. policymakers. Wealthy citizens and others in the Persian Gulf countries have funneled hundreds of millions into the conflict.



## U.S. Response

Washington can tighten counter-terrorism financing cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, but significantly undermining ISIS's financial base would now require rolling back its access to local Syrian and Iraqi income sources.

## ENTERPRISING CRIMINALS

### » Extortion

ISIS levies around \$8 million per month in "taxes" on local businesses

### » Kidnapping

### » Robberies

The seizure of Mosul's central bank netted tens of millions of dollars

### » Counterfeiting

### » Smuggling

Oil, weapons, and antiquities

### » Racketeering

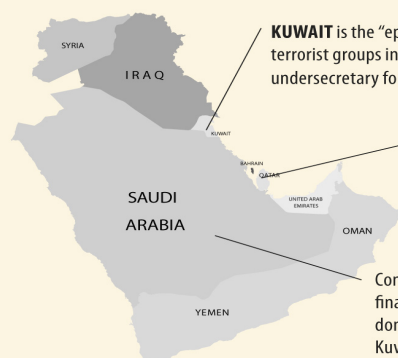
## Sources

- » Declaring an Islamic State, Running a Criminal Enterprise
- » Qatar and ISIS Funding: The U.S. Approach
- » Saudi Funding of ISIS
- » The Terrorist Funding Disconnect with Qatar and Kuwait

## Stay Ahead of Events in Iraq

WashingtonInstitute.org  
@washinstitute

## ALL IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: GULF FUNDING



**KUWAIT** is the "epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria" according to the Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

Another permissive environment for terrorist financing, **QATAR's** political interests sometimes conflict with America's counterterrorism agenda.

Contrary to conventional thinking, **SAUDI ARABIA's** financial monitoring efforts are effective enough that donors there are encouraged to send money through Kuwait to ensure that it reaches Syria.

## RESEARCH SITES

Security Council  
[www.un.org/eng/sc/](http://www.un.org/eng/sc/)

Amnesty International  
[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

Human Rights Watch  
[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

Relief and Reconciliation  
[www.reliefandreconciliation.org](http://www.reliefandreconciliation.org)

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-recruiting-westerners-how-islamic-state-goes-after-non-muslims-recent-converts-west-1680076>

<sup>ii</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/world/middleeast/un-raises-estimate-of-dead-in-syria-conflict-to-191000.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/world/middleeast/un-raises-estimate-of-dead-in-syria-conflict-to-191000.html?_r=0)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://news.wypr.org/post/displaced-iraqi-citizens-flee-sunni-militants>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/11/isis-iraq-numbers\\_n\\_5659239.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/11/isis-iraq-numbers_n_5659239.html)

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2014/09/islamic-state-releases-map-of-5-year-plan-to-spread-from-spain-to-china>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/10/01/islamic-state-spread-pakistan-india-china-mali/16507043/>

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2749197/ISIS-arming-US-military-hardware-wage-jihad-Middle-East-seizing-weapons-Syrian-rebels-Iraqi-soldiers.html>

<sup>x</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/american-weapons-find-their-way-to-isis-again/381733/>